

**STRATEGY
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**TIGHTENING THE HELMET STRINGS:
THE FUTURE OF THE U.S. – JAPAN SECURITY RELATIONSHIP**

勝って兜の緒を締めよ

BY

Joseph N. Flanz

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**Tightening the Helmet Strings: The Future of the U.S.-Japan Security
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ABSTRACT

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During the mid-1990s, the U.S.-Japan security relationship was confronted with new challenges created by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new Asian political and economic dynamics. At first, slow to react to these changed circumstances, Japanese and American security managers eventually grappled with the issue and developed a security architecture for future cooperation. Although the drift in the relationship has been halted, the alliance must deal with a host of problems – China, North Korea, U.S. basing issues – if it is to survive and prosper in first decades of the 21st century. Political leadership in both Tokyo and Washington is the key ingredient to ensure the credibility of the alliance is maintained.

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PREFACE

A decade after the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (MST) endures. In its heyday, the alliance formed an effective bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Far East. It allowed Japan to recover from the ruins of World War II without spending exorbitant sums on defense or posing a threat to its regional neighbors. It provided the United States with strategically essential forward bases, providing both military flexibility and reassurance to the Asia-Pacific region. The relationship was never without obstacles. Its renewal in 1960 led to the downfall of the Japanese government. In the intervening four decades the alliance has been buffeted by bouts of vituperative trade disputes, increasingly intractable base issues, particularly on Okinawa, and political attack both from the left and right. Throughout its existence, however, the MST's advocates – both Japanese and American – have championed its utility and effectiveness. They have labored to define and redefine its importance, to establish mechanisms for cooperation, and to protect the arrangement from attacks by its critics.

At the beginning of a new century, the MST is once again under critical attack. Arguments run the gamut. Some question its relevance now that the Soviet Union no longer exists. Others point to the rise of multilateral regional institutions that could act as an alternative to a military alliance. Still others question the social, cultural and political costs of the relationship. Rising nationalism, questions of symmetry arising from disparate treaty responsibilities, and differing national and regional interests have been cited as reasons why the Mutual Security Treaty is either no longer relevant or in need of radical restructuring.

Despite the vastly changed security environment in Asia, far different from that at the inception of the MST, the U.S.-Japan security relationship remains an essential element for both the peace and stability of the entire Asian region and the mutual security of both treaty partners. This paper explores the strategic changes which have occurred in Asia over the past ten years, reviews what has not changed, discusses critical issues facing the future of the alliance, and offers suggestions for maintaining the viability of the relationship into the future.

TIGHTENING THE HELMET STRINGS: THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-JAPAN SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

勝って兜の緒を締めよ

"Katte Kabuto no O o Shimeyo" - "After Victory, Tighten One's Helmet Strings"

(Japanese Proverb)

The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States (hereinafter referred to as the Mutual Security Treaty or MST) has been the solid rock upon which the U.S. and Japan have built a security framework. It has brought prosperity and peace to both nations and a stable regional security environment to all of Asia. The MST has endured domestic opposition, Asian wars, the threat of war, economic turmoil and a forty-year struggle with Communism. Ironically, it has been victory in the Cold War that most recently has brought the relationship into question. Is an alliance forged in the aftermath of World War II relevant to today's Asian condition? Is a bilateral security relationship the best way to defend Japan's security, or is it a vestige of a past era and incompatible with the trend toward multilateral organizations? Does the United States intend to remain a Pacific power? Will it continue to remain a reliable and trusted security ally despite seemingly endless trade differences?

These and similar questions can and should be answered affirmatively. U.S. and Japanese interests are well served by the security relationship. However, its continuation cannot merely be assumed. Times have changed and the relationship must adapt to new circumstances. With careful attention to detail, a strong and resilient partnership can serve the needs of Japan, the United States, and the Asian region well into the 21st century. The first step in the process must be a clear understanding of the new Asian environment and its impact upon the alliance.

THE NEW ASIAN STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

At the inception of the U.S.-Japan security relationship, half of Asia remained colonized or was emerging from wars of national liberation.¹ Communism was triumphant in China. A war was blazing on the Korean Peninsula. Most Asians were impoverished with scant hope of enjoying Western living standards. Yet, under the aegis of U.S. leadership, over the next four decades East Asia flourished, developed economically, and increasingly grew in political sophistication. With the marked exception of the wars in Indochina, the region enjoyed relative peace and security. China's departure from Maoism and Sino-U.S. rapprochement in the 1970s added further stability. North Korea remained and still remains a threat to peace but has been contained by ROK-U.S. military cooperation and Seoul's economic superiority over the North. Of greatest importance, however, the Soviet Union, the major threat to the serenity of Asia, particularly northeast Asia, and the major foe against whom the Mutual Security Treaty was crafted, has ceased to exist.

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 heralded a new era. The Soviet Union's demise

signaled the end of the forty-year old Cold War, and although the most significant changes following its fall occurred in Europe, its end was warmly welcomed in Japan. Threat briefings throughout the 1980s routinely highlighted the Soviet Far East buildup to include deployment of amphibious warfare ships, aircraft carriers and modern bombers.² Japanese defense planning was fixed on protecting the home islands. U.S.-Japan military planning committees developed combined defense plans and exercises focused on repelling Soviet invaders from Japan. This threat of a Soviet/Russian offensive against Japan has now evaporated.³

As Russia's fortunes in the 1990s have waned, those of the People's Republic of China have waxed brilliantly. China's rise as a major economic power is striking. Real Gross Domestic Product doubled from 1990 to 1997 (\$2,150 billion to \$4,250 billion).⁴ Per capita GDP increased in double digits throughout most of the decade. In trade, China is now the U.S.'s 4th largest trading partner with a trade surplus of over \$56 billion in 1998.⁵

As for the rest of post-Cold War Asia, the region has been on an economic roller coaster. The 1990s began with unprecedented growth and optimism for much of ASEAN and the Asian tigers. Relying upon export-led growth, they awed the world with increased standards of living, technological development and rising self-confidence. However, the decade ended with several nations – Korea, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia– severely chastened. The 21st century may very well still be the “Asian Century,” but its advent appears to be delayed.

In the security arena, Asia, along with the rest of the world has flirted with new concepts. At the beginning of the decade, spurred by the model of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and UN peacekeeping successes, the notion of a regional security mechanism attracted followers, particularly in Southeast Asia. An ASEAN-led collective security dialogue, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), appeared to be a natural outgrowth of ASEAN's increasing economic power, and a means of further leveraging its economic success. To date, the forum has not developed into an organization challenging existing bilateral security relationships. Its lack of focus on a particular threat, avoidance of controversial issues, and the region's economic downturn has blunted original expectations.⁶

Nowhere has the region's pattern of explosive growth and reversal been more evident than in the United States and Japan. In 1989, Japan appeared to be on the verge of eclipsing the United States. That December, the Nikkei stock index peaked at 38,695. Japan led the way in several key technologies and industries deemed essential for 21st century supremacy. Japanese citizens also began to enjoy the fruits of their legendary work ethic. They traveled overseas, bought luxury goods, and spread their culture and economic philosophy throughout Asia. As for the United States, its best days seemed behind it. Many in Tokyo lamented the demise of their former mentor. More importantly, the U.S.'s declining fortunes were punctuated by increasingly strident U.S.-Japan trade disputes casting doubt upon U.S. leadership and the will to honor security guarantees.⁷

In 2000, the U.S. is once again undoubtedly on top, enjoying a preeminence it has not known since

the end of World War II. American dominance is apparent, although its over-heated stock market eerily reminds one of 1989 Japan. As for Japan, the effects of an under-developed financial system, bureaucratic rigidity and lack of political leadership have mired the country in a decade-long recession. The Nikkei remains 45% off its 1989 high, wiping out trillions of yen in personal savings. Painful but necessary reforms, which would radically alter fundamental social and business patterns built over the past forty years, are only now being slowly introduced.⁸

This combination of the end of the Soviet threat, the rise of China, and turbulent economic conditions have influenced and will continue to influence U.S.-Japan security relations in the coming decade. To them must be added Japan's domestic political trends. The Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) thirty-eight year political monopoly on power was broken in 1993. While the country's political leadership remains conservative, the rise of other views, some indifferent to the history of the security relationship, have found a wider audience. Generational change lies at its heart. The post-war cohort of politicians that assumed power at the beginning of the present security system is rapidly passing from the scene. Their experience base, formed by Japan's wartime hardship and defeat, is foreign to a younger, more self-confident breed of politician, the product of Japan's rapid economic growth period. Their impressions of America are more likely to be molded by popular culture and reports of trade disputes than by solidarity in fending off the Soviet threat. It is well to remember that the Japanese college graduate of the year 2000 was not even a teenager when the Berlin Wall came down.

POST-COLD WAR CONTINUITIES

Divided countries are Asia's post-Cold War legacy. North Korea remains inscrutable and threatening. Since Kim Il-sung's death in 1994 and the accession of his son, Kim Chong-il, there has been no change in North Korea's belligerent policies. While the country moves inexorably downward economically, its single focus is regime survival. The growing number of defectors bearing tales of privation and hunger give credence to reports of famine. Despite privation, or perhaps because of it, North Korea remains politically obstinate and militarily dangerous. Its conventional military capability has diminished and with it the possibility of launching a successful premeditated attack. However, the North has developed new means of intimidation – primarily through its nuclear and missile development programs. In 1994, North Korea's threat to reprocess spent fuel brought the U.S. and North Korea to loggerheads. Subsequent adoption of the Agreed Framework allowed Pyongyang to draw back from the brink of confrontation and receive promises of light water nuclear reactors in return for freezing its nuclear program. In sum, a divided Korean peninsula with an unpredictable regime in the North poses a threat to the stability of northeast Asia and demands the continued close cooperation of the United States and its treaty allies.

As for China, its regional role will undoubtedly grow, but how it will use its newfound clout remains unclear. Here again, a vestige of the Cold War in the form of a divided country – China-Taiwan – provides

the potential for instability and a clash of interests. China's 1996 military and missile exercises close to Taiwan, aimed at intimidating democratic elections, spurred a U.S. response and brought Washington and Beijing closer to confrontation than was in either sides' interest.⁹ Since 1996, bilateral relations have improved somewhat with the U.S. and China cooperating where their interests intersect, e.g. North Korea and accession to the World Trade Organization. China, although asserting its sovereign rights, has curtailed arms sales and the proliferation of nuclear technology to Iran and Pakistan. U.S. policy makers, including Secretary of State Albright, began to suggest a new "constructive strategic partnership" was being formed, although the details were left unannounced. However, the improved relationship has not been problem-free. Congress has accused Beijing of human rights violations, stealing nuclear secrets and attempting to influence U.S. elections.

Beijing-Tokyo relations also have swung between cooperative and confrontational. Tokyo supported U.S. actions in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 and Chinese denunciations were strong. China offended Japanese sensitivities by conducting underground nuclear testing in July 1996, leading to the temporary suspension of elements of Japan's aid package. China also has not been shy in evoking memories of World War II both to embarrass Japan and buttress its positions. Both nations continue to contest the ownership of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands located near Taiwan, and although not a front burner issue, it can be manipulated for nationalist purposes.¹⁰

China's decision to improve its strategic military capabilities is another concern. Overall, defense spending grew by more than 50 percent over the course of the 1990s and the government has agreed to increase military spending by about 13 percent a year. Funding has concentrated heavily on modernization and power projection capabilities.¹¹ Although modest by U.S. standards, these and future capabilities could provide Beijing additional leverage in asserting territorial claims in the Spratlys and, where necessary, intimidating its neighbors.¹²

Domestically, Chinese conditions also point toward a potentially volatile future. Beijing is adjusting to a slowing economy while grappling politically with its continued transformation into a more market-based economy, both factors complicating Communist Party control. The combination of a tentative political leadership, a growing but fragile economy, and a prickly sensitivity on sovereignty issues ensures that over the near to mid-term, China's impact upon regional security will be difficult at best and a source of instability at worst.

Southeast Asia's economic retrenchment, growing separatist movements (particularly in Indonesia) and demands for greater political participation also provide the seedbed for instability. Thailand and South Korea have handled their changed economic fortunes peacefully and without threatening their developing democracies. On the other hand, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir has dealt heavy-handedly with his opposition, and Indonesia's economic collapse gave rise to demonstrations, violence and an eventual change in government, the complete import of which is yet to be fathomed. With several tens of thousands of Japanese now living and working in Southeast Asian nations, the possibility of violence

assumes national security dimensions for the Government of Japan.

JAPAN'S AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHANGE

By the mid-1990s, one could rightly argue that Japan had traveled far from the early days of the Peace Constitution. Since 1976, it has developed a basic defense policy – the National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) – and engaged in bilateral defense planning, extending beyond defense of the home islands to include defense of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). It has acquired up-to-date equipment and modernized its defense capabilities. Its defense budget is among the largest in the world.¹³ Most recently, Japan has ventured into the international peacekeeping arena, dispatching forces as part of both UN peacekeeping and international disaster relief missions.

However, within and outside Japan, critics claim Tokyo has failed to come fundamentally to grips with its changed circumstances—the end of the Cold War, Japan's emergence as a major economic power, and the lopsidedness of the U.S.-Japan security relationship.¹⁴ The argument goes that the tenets of Japan's basic security strategy, laid down by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru more than 40 years earlier remain basically unaltered. Its concept of "comprehensive security," emphasizing diplomatic and economic measures, with defense being of lesser importance, permanently relegates Japan to the role of junior partner in the U.S.-Japan security relationship.¹⁵

Lack of effective political leadership is often cited as a central shortcoming. Partly, this emanates from the Liberal Democratic Party's 1993 loss of political power and its inability to revive the economy. Further, the long-established practice of leaving defense matters in the hands of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Japan Defense Agency (JDA) experts has reached its limitations. While Japan's defense bureaucrats ably maintained the relationship through some very difficult periods, they lack the platform to rally public opinion and lead it in new directions. Change requires political leadership and few LDP leaders have had the stature or inclination to take the risk.

Political reluctance mirrors popular discomfort toward addressing military matters. While the Japanese public has responded positively to participation in UN peacekeeping, and surprisingly sharply to North Korean provocations, there is no consensus on changing the course of security policy. Granted, subjects once considered taboo – revision of Article 9, military use of space, strategic military capabilities – are now regularly discussed, and usually without the fear of having to resign over a misstep. Nevertheless, Article 9 remains popular and in place, serving as a moderating influence, unlikely to be repealed or amended in the near to mid-term.¹⁶ Except for extremes on left and right, most Japanese are uncomfortable with tampering with a proven formula.

Finally, Tokyo must take into account the sensitivities of its Asian neighbors who remain suspicious of a militarily capable Japan. Although over fifty years has elapsed since Japan's wartime depredations, they are not forgotten. Apologies have had to be wrested from Japanese politicians, giving the impression they are rendered more for the convenience of trade's sake than spoken out of true contrition. The

passage of time has also made an honest accounting of the war almost impossible. Finally, Japan's post-war economic performance, although much emulated, has not generally burnished Tokyo's image as a regional leader. Its aloofness and insularity outweigh Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), grants, and investment. Thus, while Japan is a major policy player by virtue of its economic prominence, it carries too much baggage to assert regional leadership independently.

UNSETTLED U.S.-JAPAN RELATIONS

The beginning of the 1990s marked a low point for U.S. policy with its staying power openly called into question. Withdrawal from Philippine bases, apparent inability to compete economically with Asian partners, and domestic eagerness to enjoy a post-Cold War peace dividend convinced many Asians that the days of U.S. military presence were numbered. Gradually, those fears have been largely put to rest. Military force levels in the Pacific have stabilized at approximately 100,000 and that number has been established as a Department of Defense policy objective.¹⁷ Present forward-deployed forces with power projection capabilities can meet foreseeable challenges. And, despite trade differences and rumblings of cultural imperialism, the United States is generally recognized as a stabilizing influence and regional balancer.

Against this backdrop, the U.S.-Japan relationship has been touted as the fundamental pillar of the United States' East Asian security policy. Without forward-deployed forces operating from bases in Japan, America's ability to maintain deterrence on the Korean peninsula, protect its Pacific SLOCs, and provide the basis for a stable regional environment would be infinitely more difficult. In their continuing attempts to bolster the relationship, policy makers routinely refer to it as fundamentally sound, or "stronger than it has ever been."¹⁸ However, the truth is more complicated. Relations have run the gamut from close to contentious to conciliatory.

The immediate problem has centered on trade policy and the inability to any longer shelter defense issues from trade disputes. Both sides are to blame. In the early days of the Clinton administration bilateral security issues occupied a lower rung on the policy ladder than did economic ones, signifying not only the administration's recognition of the changed regional strategic environment but also its single-minded focus on the economy. This corresponded in time to Japan's efforts to revive its flagging economy. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic and political response to its prolonged recession was strikingly similar to that of an earlier age when Tokyo was playing economic catch-up. Export-led growth was encouraged, and huge and costly public works projects were undertaken to spend Japan's way out of recession. Emphasis on economics placed each side in conflict with the other and defense cooperation suffered.

Diplomatically as well, the U.S. and Japan also appeared to be adrift. Tokyo's contribution to the Gulf War effort, over \$13 billion, won few plaudits in Washington. On North Korean matters, Washington was apt to deal bilaterally with Pyongyang and "consult" afterwards with Tokyo, pressuring Japan to

accept arrangements already agreed upon. Most importantly, U.S. interest in China grew during the decade. Backing off from a strict human rights linked policy, the Clinton administration increasingly was drawn in by the lure of the China market. Vague references to establishing a "strategic partnership" with Beijing caused many in Tokyo to wonder if the U.S. was considering a basic realignment of its posture in East Asia.¹⁹ By the mid-1990s, U.S.-Japan security relations were at a nadir.

THE CASE FOR THE RELATIONSHIP

Despite these problems, the bases for a U.S.-Japan security partnership remain both compelling and explicable. Together, the U.S. and Japan account for more than a third of the world's goods and services.²⁰ Each is a major trading partner of the other and both rely on other Asian markets for raw materials and as a market for their finished goods. Economic prosperity is dependent upon a stable regional environment and the MST provides that stability in what is one of the world's most heavily armed and volatile regions. Moreover, Japan, taking into account its unique history, has placed self-imposed limits on its military capabilities, denying itself the right of collective security.²¹ Its partnership with the U.S. is its sole security guarantee, providing a nuclear umbrella and, in the event of attack on Japanese territory, credible support from the world's most powerful military force.

Japan's continued adherence to the relationship is also more than the product of strategic inertia or lack of political leadership. A cost-benefit analysis points to alliance with the U.S. as the most practicable and efficient means of achieving security. Japan is isolated from the rest of Asia by geography, history and culture. It has no natural allies. China represents a future rival and potential threat. Russia is currently weak but alien and a source of concern. For the foreseeable future, probably the best that can be expected from the Republic of Korea is improved relations and modest military-to-military exchanges. Southeast Asia nations, collectively through ASEAN or bilaterally, are too small and distant from Japan to provide for its security needs. The United Nations has proven to be an imperfect instrument, as demonstrated in Somalia and Bosnia. Finally, developing a fully independent defense capability would be a perilous choice. Japan would have to develop a nuclear deterrent, robust command and control system, extensive intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, power projection platforms, a missile defense system and a substantially larger military force than presently exists. Not only would such a force be prohibitively expensive, it is also doubtful consensus could be reached within the Japanese body politic to fund or man it. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive of any other single development more likely to spur an Asian arms race faster than Japan's decision to unilaterally provide for its own security.

In contrast, the Mutual Security Treaty provides a high degree of assurance at relatively low cost and is compatible with the strategic concerns of most of Japan's neighbors. It also benefits both partners. The advantages are not, as some argue, to Japan's benefit alone (or to the U.S.'s, depending upon the critic). Responsibilities may be asymmetrical, but both contribute and derive tangible benefits. For Japan, it is security. For the U.S., use of bases located in Japan, especially on Okinawa, provides an unequaled

strategic power projection capability, reducing crisis response times and permitting American forces to respond rapidly to regional contingencies. Japan is also the U.S.'s most generous ally in terms of host nation support. During the current five year bilateral Special Measures Agreement (1996-2001), the GOJ pays virtually all the costs of local national labor employed by the United States, as well as costs for public utilities. Japan has also upgraded U.S. facilities under a separate Facilities Improvement Program. Altogether, taking into account the full range of all support programs, to include foregone taxes, rents, revenues, etc., Japan's monetary contribution to U.S. forces is approximately \$5.5-6.5 billion per year.²²

REINVIGORATING THE RELATIONSHIP

Clearly, the U.S.-Japan security relationship remains relevant. However, to survive it must be dynamic, adjusting to new circumstances. By 1995, such was not the case. Not only did Japan fail to update its security policy, both parties failed to aggressively defend the MST's mutual benefits from attacks by its critics. Left further unattended, the U.S.-Japan security relationship was in danger of entering a downward spiral from which it might not have recovered. Fortunately, American and Japanese leaders, both political and bureaucratic, realized further drift would endanger core national security interests. Working in tandem and individually they began to reassert control. Their objectives were fourfold: reaffirm the relationship at the highest level; reinterpret Japanese and U.S. defense policies in light of post-Cold War realities; reinvigorate U.S.-Japan defense planning; and regain popular support for the alliance, particularly in Japan. In retrospect, it is clear that the process was neither as orderly or sequential as it often appears when laid out in subsequent speeches and articles. Nevertheless, by 1997 the drift was halted, and despite its inherent untidiness, the process demonstrated the two nations could work together where vital interests were involved.

In 2000, how strong is the alliance? Judging its health is a multifaceted proposition. Elements include political support at both the leadership and popular levels, the security architecture, and day-to-day military interoperability. Despite vicissitudes, all receive a passing grade.²³ Structurally, the relationship is more solid. In the relatively short space of approximately 30 months (February 1995-September 1997) the basic architecture of the alliance was overhauled. The United States' contribution was to reaffirm the centrality of Japan to its Asian strategy and to commit itself to maintain adequate forces in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan in turn revised its fundamental defense policy document, the National Defense Program Outline. Both sides agreed to the New Defense Guidelines to expand the scope of their bilateral planning to include situations around Japan. Finally, both worked together to alleviate the growing irritant of Okinawa on the relationship. At the political level, much of the acerbity surrounding the relationship in the early 1990s was dissipated, with the Joint Declaration of April 1996 setting a cooperative tone. Trade issues, particularly the trade deficit, remain, but have been relatively muted compared to five years ago.

Finally, popular support for the alliance remains stable and the trend is favorable. A recent Yomiuri

newspaper poll reports that for the first time in fifteen years a majority of Japanese and Americans thought bilateral ties were either "good" or "very good."²⁴ Over 80 percent of Japanese expected the U.S. to be a "good partner" in the 21st century. Traditionally, Japanese respond less favorably to more specific questions referring to U.S.-Japan security relations and the subject of bases. Nevertheless, approximately two-thirds of Japanese generally approve of the security relationship.

THE FUTURE

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Updating documents and reviewing policies, albeit necessary, do not guarantee the smooth functioning of a complicated relationship; bureaucratic competence cannot take the place of political leadership. Such leadership is not evident in Japan. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has yet to regain its pre-1993 form. Its priorities lie elsewhere than defense. It has had to concentrate on reinvigorating the economy and regaining political dominance. Security issues are of a lesser concern, except when external events impose themselves.

Further, the public's attention is only sporadically focused on defense issues. Immediately after the Taepo Dong missile launch on 31 August 1998, public opinion favored improved capabilities to deal with the perception of a growing North Korean threat. Security concerns rose again when in March 1999 North Korean spy ships intruded into Japanese territory and were pursued by the Maritime Self-Defense Force.²⁵ However, public interest appears to have peaked, at least until the next incident. Moreover, there is no evidence that North Korean concerns have affected resistance to other defense initiatives that are now or soon will be before the Diet. Without firm leadership, bureaucratic turf battles and the unwillingness to expend political capital on what may be an unpopular issue will delay further progress.

As for the United States, 2000 is an election year. Prosperity has temporarily muted discontent over Japan's failure to further open its markets. Moreover, concern over China's burgeoning trade surplus has diverted attention away from Japan. At this stage in the campaign, it is unclear whether trade will become an election issue. Early debates suggest not, but an unexpected slowdown in the U.S. economy would certainly propel trade to the forefront again, creating an inhospitable atmosphere for defense progress.

As in the past, it is also possible Washington and Tokyo might approach defense issues from different perspectives, with different time schedules in mind. U.S. military operators and planners take their work seriously. Given the task to plan for new missions, they will tackle it enthusiastically with the desire to see major progress "on their watch." The New Defense Guidelines may be a case in point. It lays out a clear direction for future planning. However, from a Japanese perspective, considerable preliminary spadework is necessary before actual planning commences. The truly hard issues – determining exactly what Japan's responsibilities are in situations around its territory, what kinds of support can be made available to U.S. forces, and how it should be accomplished – are *terra incognita*.

Focusing on only the operational elements of the relationship could be detrimental to the health of the entire system. Progress in one area must be weighed against other U.S.-Japan security objectives, to include relocation of Futenma Air Base, negotiating a new Special Measures Agreement, reaching consensus on North Korean policy, technology exchange, Theater Missile Defense, etc. Prioritization and emphasis must take into account political realities.

As always, the key objective must be to maintain the alliance's credibility. Senior political and military leaders, while continuing to focus attention on programmatic progress, must ensure that all aspects of the relationship are in balance and advancing at a rate that can be sustained. In the case of the Guidelines, for example, a cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment is necessary to determine the future pace of discussions. The goal should be a clear understanding of the potential for conflict in Korea or a crisis in the Taiwan Straits. If the probability for either is high, then urgency is required. If not, a slower, more deliberate approach can be taken without undue risk. The inefficiencies resulting from lack of a systematic and tested plan would increase risk, but would not imperil the eventual outcome of a conflict. More importantly, understanding Japan's ambivalence regarding new roles and missions creates a positive environment for cooperation.

It is also incumbent on the political leadership, particularly in the United States, to establish mechanisms for true consultation on issues critical to Japan. Probably nothing has rankled Japan's political and bureaucratic leaders more than the impression that they are treated as junior partners. The first step should be improved intelligence exchange, followed by consultations on security issues of mutual importance. Secretary of Defense William Perry's handling of the North Korean policy review provides an excellent model on how to undertake an Asian initiative while maintaining the support of allies. Dr. Perry coordinated with ROK and Japanese officials throughout all stages of the process, stopping off in Seoul and Tokyo each time he was about to enter Pyongyang and each time he returned. Japanese and Korean views were sought and taken into account. There were no surprises when he briefed his findings. Also, there were no leaks that would have forced Japan and Korea to respond before they were ready. This model applies equally as well to other U.S. policy initiatives.²⁶

In the case of Japan, political leaders and policy makers must take the lead in justifying to the Japanese electorate the continuing need for U.S. presence and the benefits that flow from it. There is a positive story to tell and it should be portrayed in those terms. There must also be a maturing on the Japanese side regarding handling intelligence issues to ensure a continued flow of information.

OKINAWA

In the short term there appears to be no alternative to maintaining U.S. forces on Okinawa. Given the uncertainties in Korea, Okinawan-based U.S. forces provide a strategic deterrent capability that arguably overrides local opposition and irritation. However, managing the issue will continue to be a major bilateral concern, with the burden falling on the Japanese Government. Relocation momentum for

Futenma must be maintained. Three years have already elapsed since the final December 1996 SACO report. A serious accident resulting in civilian casualties, or another horrific crime committed by U.S. servicemen, could easily result in a political crisis forcing Japanese authorities to respond to Okinawan demands. Compromise is required. Demonstrating flexibility, the U.S. Government could silence critics, empower supporters of the MST and gain the trust of the Okinawans. The centerpiece for this flexibility should be agreement to a relocation of perhaps 20 years duration with the right of renewal, coupled with the construction of a transportable sea-based facility (SBF). If the SBF is operated without incident, the Marine Corps proves to be a good neighbor, and the community benefits from an economic boom, renewal could be possible. If not, another area might be induced to accept it. In any event, the process will have been kicked down the road for a quarter of a century.

It is also likely that in the 2020s U.S. forces could be greatly reduced in Okinawa without incurring unacceptable risk. It is difficult to conceive that a divided Korean Peninsula will continue to exist in 2025. Unification of the peninsula, hopefully peacefully, would remove a major threat to Japanese security allowing for a drawdown of forces. Moreover, a unified Korea would probably result in Seoul's request for removal of most U.S. troops. Thus, the only major concentration of U.S. forces forward deployed in Asia seventy-five years after the end of World War II would then be in Japan, an intolerable political situation. Political pressures against forward presence would build (both in Japan and the U.S.) and public support would decline, despite the other legitimate missions that would remain (regional stability, China). It is much better to respond positively to such a challenge when it occurs by being prepared to draw down most U.S. ground presence from Okinawa and relying upon pre-positioning and air and naval forces to implement U.S. strategy.

CHINA

China's possible hegemonistic intentions loom over U.S.-Japan security relations. The most likely scenario, a China-Taiwan crisis provoked by Taipei's independence aspirations, could not only lead to a Taiwan Straits confrontation but also a crisis between U.S. and Japanese foreign policy makers. Chinese threats of blockade, missile firings or attempts to seize offshore islands would likely engender a U.S. military response involving forces based in Japan. Should Beijing attempt to intimidate Tokyo to prevent a U.S. deployment, Japan would then be caught between an implacable Beijing on the one hand and its responsibilities under the MST on the other. Regular defense discussions and planning under the new Defense Guidelines will be useful to test various courses of action, but they probably will not provide enough clarity to deal with a scenario until it actually occurs. The ultimate course of action would be decided at hurried high level consultations, an arena in which Japan has proved itself uncomfortable.

The preferred solution is to never allow a crisis to develop. Here, the responsibility falls directly on U.S. policy makers, who must bear the primary burden of convincing Taipei that precipitous moves toward autonomy are in no one's interest. The U.S. must also clarify its future relationship with China to Japan's

satisfaction. Espousing the idea of the PRC as a "strategic partner" has unsettled Japanese (and Americans) who remain concerned over China's future political direction. Although it is not impossible to have two strategic partners in the same region, it defies imagination how Japan and China could be viewed as equivalent in security terms. Japan is the U.S.'s strategic partner in Asia. Washington and Tokyo are treaty allies with a fifty-year history of cooperation. The United States must make it clear to Japan, China and Asia at large that the bond between Washington and Tokyo remains indivisible.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

North Korea will remain the single greatest cause for potential instability in the near- to mid-term. Realizing that economic and political reform would most likely spell the end of the regime, Pyongyang will not open its system. Fathoming that Washington, Tokyo and Seoul all wish to avoid crisis, the North will try to manipulate relations among the three, attempting to divide one from the other by offering threats or blandishments as circumstances require. For Tokyo, it may be hints of normalization and an accounting for missing Japanese citizens; for Seoul, family reunification or Red Cross talks. As for the United States, North Korea could hold out the hope for cooperation in arms control. The U.S. must take the lead in coordinating policy and thwarting Pyongyang's divide and conquer strategy.

Looking further into the future, the U.S., as suggested earlier, must begin considering eventual reunification of the Korean Peninsula and what that will mean not only for regional security but also for U.S. forward-deployed forces. It is doubtful any sizable U.S. forces would be necessary, welcomed or financially supported in Korea once a North Korean threat is gone. Alternative basing schemes – pre-positioning, relocation of some assets, either to U.S. territory (Guam, Hawaii) or to other Asian nations – should be studied in preparation for eventual adjustments. In the event, clear planning followed by detailed consultations with Asian nations could diminish the perception of a U.S. withdrawal from Asia, thus preventing a repeat of the early 1990s.

CONCLUSION

Nothing is permanent. Eventually, the special security relationship between the U.S. and Japan will run its course and give way to new alignments. The timing and causes for the end of the Mutual Security Treaty are unknown and unknowable. Therefore, we are forced to deal with the present and what can be dimly seen at the horizon. By skillful management, hallmarked by cooperation and consultation, the U.S.-Japan alliance can continue into the next decades of this century, sure of its purpose and secure in the public support of both nations. When its inevitable end does come, the care and consideration rendered now will help to ensure that, although the alliance may end, friendship will continue.

WORD COUNT = 5,963

ENDNOTES

¹ The first U.S.-Japan Security Treaty was dated 8 September 1952 and was entered into immediately following the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty on the same day. The treaty was superceded by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the U.S. on 23 June 1960. Sheila A. Smith, "The Evolution of Military Cooperation in the U.S.-Japan Alliance," in The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Past, Present and Future, ed. Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1999), 69-93; and Japan Defense Agency, Defense of Japan (Tokyo: Japan Times, Ltd., 1998), 316; 441.

² See Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), published during the years 1981-1988. Each edition covers an analysis of the Soviet buildup with a chapter devoted to regional balances. For example, the 1988 edition, pp. 122-126 deals with the balance in Asia. Successive Japanese defense white papers (published annually under the title "Defense of Japan" also dealt with the Soviet threat in chapters entitled "Military Situation in the Asia-Pacific Region."

³ During the 1980s, major U.S. Army-Japan Ground Self-Defense Force command post exercises were held semiannually in Hokkaido or northeast Honshu (Northern Army and Northeast Army areas of responsibility respectively), the areas of Japan closest to the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, bilateral exercises have been conducted throughout Japan. See Defense of Japan, 1998, 388-392.

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⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Handbook of International Economic Statistics," February 1999, Table 2. Available from <http://www.odci.gov/cia/di/products/china_economy/index.html> ;<<http://www.odci.gov/cia/di/products/hies/index.html>>. Internet; accessed 3 February 2000.

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⁷ Yoichi Funabashii, Alliance Adrift, (New York, Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1999), 225-276.

⁸ E.J. Dionne, Jr., "Japan: After the Miracle," Washington Post, 13 April 1999, A21. Sandra Sugawara, "Excess Capacity Slowing Japan's Recovery," Washington Post, 25 December 1998, B9; and "Japan's Outlook Darkens: Government Says Economic Fall is Far Worse Than Expected," Washington Post, 12 September 1998, D14. Chester Dawson, "Japan Economy Shrinks Again," Associated Press, 3 December 1998. "Restoration in Progress: A Survey of Business in Japan," Economist, 27 November - 3 December 1999.

⁹ Barton Gellman, U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in '96; Tension Over Taiwan Prompted Repair of Ties," Washington Post, 21 June 1998, A1; "Reappraisal Led to New China Policy; Skeptics Abound, But U.S. 'Strategic Partnership' Yielding Results," Washington Post, 22 June 1998, A1. Gellman,

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¹⁰ Robert Suro, "GOP Calls for Hill Probe of Chinese Nuclear Spying," Washington Post, 8 March 1999, A13. Select Committee of the United States House of Representatives, U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China (also known as the "Cox Report"), Report 105-851, 25 May 1999. Steven Mufson, "China Conduct Nuclear Test While Negotiating Ban: Blast Worries Other Participants in Comprehensive Treaty Talks," Washington Post, 9 June 1996, A22; "Yen Loans to China; Government Expected to Send Survey Mission Possibly Next Month to Explore Some Improvement Measures As a Result of [China's] Freeze on Nuclear Testing," Sankei, 11 August 1996, 1, in Daily Summary of Japanese Press (Political Section, American Embassy, Tokyo), 15 August 1996, 1. For a discussion of Sino-Japanese animosity, see Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Problem of Memory," Foreign Affairs, (November, 1998/December 1998, Volume 77, Number 6), 37.

¹¹ Carl Ford, "China's Military: A Second Opinion," The National Interest (No. 57, Fall 1999), 71; "Ford Recommends Increased Arms Sales to Taiwan," 25 March 1999. Available from <http://www.taiwaninformation.org/view/speeches/ford032599.html>. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000. For a contrasting view of China, see Gerald Segal, "Does China Matter?," Foreign Affairs (Volume 78, No. 5, September/October 1999), 24-36.

¹² The Spratlys are claimed variously and occupied by six nations. Although a more distant threat to Northeast Asia, and hence Japan, the islands lie athwart vital sea lines of communication, potentially threatening the free flow of goods to and from Japan. In 1995, China occupied Mischief Reef claimed by the Philippines. China refuses to discuss the Spratlys in a multilateral setting, asserting it will deal only bilaterally with other claimants. The potential for miscalculation, and hence confrontation, remains a possibility. See, "Calming the Sea of Troubles," Economist, 6 November 1999. Available from http://www.economist.com/18XFOS9A/tfs/reg_shortcut_frames.html. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000; "China and the Philippines Reefstricken," Economist, 29 May 1999. Available from http://www.economist.com/18XFOS9A/tfs/reg_shortcut_frames.html. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000; "Philippines: Scraply Islands," Economist, 24 May 1997. Available from http://www.economist.com/18XFOS9A/tfs/reg_shortcut_frames.html. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000; "Seas of Trouble," Economist, 25 May 1996. Available from http://www.economist.com/18XFOS9A/tfs/reg_shortcut_frames.html. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000.

¹³ Exchange rates have complicated military expenditure rankings. There is no doubt, however, that Japan has one of the world's largest defense budgets. According to the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI), Japan's defense expenditures for 1998 in \$U.S. was \$51.29 billion. SIPRI lists the U.S., UK, France, Germany, China, ROK, and Russia as \$251.84, \$32.32, \$45.98, \$38.88, \$16.9, \$15.04 and \$11.2 billion respectively (all figures in 1995 dollars and exchange rates). Available from http://www.sipri.se:8020/IRSIS/owa/milex_retrieve. Internet; accessed on 4 February 2000. See also, Defense of Japan, 1998, 352. Despite Japan's high relative military expenditures, it is notorious, because of high personnel costs and limited production runs, for not getting a big bang for the yen.

¹⁴ "The Call to Arms," Economist, 27 February 1999. Available from <http://www.economist.com/archive/view.cgi>. Internet; accessed 3 February 2000; "Let Japan Sail Forth," Economist, 27 February 1999. Available from <http://www.economist.com/archive/view.cgi>. Internet; accessed on 3 February 1999; "An American Shield for Asia?," Economist, 20 February 1999.

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¹⁵ "Thomas U. Berger, "Alliance Politics and Japan's Postwar Culture of Antimilitarism," in The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Past, Present and Future, ed. Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1999), 192-201.

¹⁶ Article 9 reads in full: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." Robert E. Ward, Japan's Political System (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978), 230. Amendments to the Constitution require initiation by a two-thirds concurring vote of all members of both houses of the National Diet and ratification by the people through an affirmative vote by a majority of those participating in a referendum on the proposed amendment. Ward, 145.

¹⁷ Funabashi, 249-254.

¹⁸ See, for example: Stanley O. Roth, "The United States and Japan – Partnership and Challenges in a New Millenium," 8 December 1999. Available from
<http://www.state.gov/policy/remarks/1999/991208_roth_japan.html>. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000.

¹⁹ Barton Gellman, "U.S. and China to Seek a 'Strategic Partnership,'" Washington Post, 30 April 1998, A1. "New Era or New Cold War," BBC News, 25 June 1998. Available from
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²⁰ Stanley O. Roth, "The United States and Japan – Partnership and Challenges in a New Millenium," 8 December 1999. Available from <http://www.state.gov/policy/remarks/1999/991208_roth_japan.html>. Internet; accessed on 3 February 2000.

²¹ Defense of Japan, 1998, 65-86.

²² "Report on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense," March 1998. Available from
<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/allied_contrib98/allied98_1.html>. Internet; accessed on 6 February 2000; "Responsibility Sharing Report," March 1999. Available from
<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/allied_contrib99/rs99-chpt1.html>. Internet; accessed on 6 February 2000.

²³ This paper primarily deals with the politics and management of the security relationship and is not intended to deal with day-to-day operations. Over the past two decades, U.S. forces and their Japanese counterparts have developed a schedule of bilateral command post and field training exercises designed to improve coordination and interoperability. Ground exercises, subject to closer media scrutiny are probably more modest than naval and air exercises which take place over the horizon or out of sight of Japan's ubiquitous media. For a list of training U.S. Forces-JSDF exercises, see: Defense of Japan, 1998, 388-92.

²⁴ "50% of Japanese, Americans say Japan-U.S. relations 'good'," Yomiuri Shinbun, 28 December

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²⁵ "Japan Says Spy Ships Were North Korean, Formally Protests," Associated Press, 30 March 1999; "N. Korea Denies Knowledge of Ships," Associated Press, 27 March 1999; "Japan Defense Chief Says Ships Chased by Destroyers Return to North Korea," CNN, 25 March 1999; "Military Dispatch Against Suspicious Ships Leaves Japan Shaken," Associated Press, 24 March 1999; "Japan Calls Out Military over Rogue Ships," Reuters, 23 March 1999.

²⁶ Dr. William Perry, "Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs," Washington, DC, 12 October 1999. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/991012_perry_nkorea.htm>. Internet; accessed on 30 December 1999; Dr. William Perry, Interview with Natalie Allen, CNN, 17 September 1999. Available from <http://www.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/991012_perry_nkorea.htm>. Internet; accessed on 14 February 2000; Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and Dr. William Perry, "Press briefing on U.S. Relations with North Korea," Washington, D.C., 17 September 1999. Available from <http://www.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/991012_perry_nkorea.htm>. Internet; accessed on 14 February 2000; William J. Perry, "Korea: Why We Can't Stand Still," Washington Post, 17 October 1999, B9; Steven Mufson, "U.S. Offering North Korea a Choice of Pathways: Conflict or Calm," Washington Post, 26 June 1999, A22.

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